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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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Climate change in the Arab region: relevant regional and international developments

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is supporting member States with technical assistance and capacity development in the areas of climate change assessment, adaptation, mitigation and negotiations. Those efforts are in response to resolutions adopted at the thirtieth ESCWA session and prior sessions, as well as resolutions adopted by ministerial councils responsible for water, the environment, electricity and meteorology under the auspices of the League of Arab States.

The present document reviews preparations for climate change negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the issuance of associated scientific work conducted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in the light of commitments set forth under the Paris Agreement. This includes support to Arab States with respect to the update of nationally determined contributions anticipated for submission in 2020 and other issues under negotiation. The document also reviews the delivery of a range of climate change-related services and events under the newly created Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies, and complementary and forthcoming activities supporting ESCWA member States in the areas of capacity-building, technical assistance, regional platforms, integrated planning and access to knowledge.

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Introduction

1. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is supporting member States with technical assistance and capacity development in the areas of climate change assessment, adaptation, mitigation and negotiations. Those efforts are in response to resolution 329 (XXX) adopted at the thirtieth ESCWA session, which was held in Beirut, from 25 to 28 June 2018, as well as prior requests for assistance received from member States, including those articulated in resolutions adopted by ministerial councils that convene under the auspices of the League of Arab States. Over the past six months, such efforts have included delivering technical and capacity-building support to ESCWA member States, and responding to ministerial resolutions adopted by the Arab Ministerial Water Council, the Council of Ministers Responsible for the Environment, the Arab Ministerial Council for Electricity, and the Arab Council of Ministers Responsible for Meteorology and Climate and its associated Arab Permanent Committee for Meteorology.

2. The present document reviews recent developments in the climate change arena within the context of global climate change negotiations of particular interest to Arab countries, as well as work related to the establishment of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies and the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR), in accordance with resolution 329 (XXX). It also outlines planned future activities and presents recommendations for consideration.

I. CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS

A. Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C

3. The twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) invited the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to prepare a special report on global warming of 1.5°C, as part of the decision that led to the adoption of the Paris Agreement in December 2015.

4. Based on intergovernmental and expert deliberations on the scope of the report and possible socioeconomic scenarios for modelling a 1.5°C outcome, the report was prepared under the joint scientific leadership of all three IPCC working groups. A total of 91 authors covering 44 nationalities prepared the report with the support of 133 contributing authors. The final title of the report is "Global warming of 1.5°C, an IPCC special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty". It is also referred to as the Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C.

5. The Special Report's Summary for Policymakers was approved by Governments at the IPCC meeting in Incheon, Republic of Korea, on 8 October 2018. It will serve as a scientific contribution to the Talanoa Dialogue at the twenty-fourth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP24) to the UNFCCC to be held in Katowice, Poland from 2 to 14 December 2018.

6. The Special Report finds that since pre-industrial times, human activities have caused approximately 1°C of global warming to date. At this rate, the global average temperature will reach 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels between 2030 and 2052. However, it recognizes that some parts of the world will warm faster than others, and that more extreme climate events are to be expected.

7. The Special Report highlights that a number of climate change impacts could be avoided by limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared with 2°C or more. It also recognizes that limiting warming to 1.5°C requires changes in production and consumption patterns at an unprecedented scale to drastically cut carbon dioxide emissions before 2030. Various greenhouse gas emissions pathways for reaching a 1.5°C target include a

range of technological and geoengineering options, significant deep emission cuts across all sectors, and major behavioural changes.

8. The Special Report also states that climate-related risks for natural and human systems are higher for global warming of 1.5°C than at present, but lower than at 2°C. Those risks depend on the magnitude and rate of warming, geographic location, levels of development and vulnerability, and on the choices and implementation of adaptation and mitigation options. It also finds that limits to adaptive capacity that exist at 1.5°C of global warming become more pronounced at higher levels of warming and vary by sector, with site-specific implications for vulnerable regions, ecosystems and human health. The Special Report thus asserts that adaptation is always needed, and must be considered alongside mitigation efforts. It also examines the impact of global warming on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

9. To raise regional awareness of the IPCC findings, ESCWA collaborated with the Mohamed VI Polytechnic University to convene the International Conference on Adaptation Metrics and Techniques for Water, Agriculture and Resilient Cities (Benguerir, Morocco, 26-27 October 2018). The Conference included an outreach event on the IPCC Special Report held on 26 October, which was attended by the IPCC Chair, the IPCC Secretary and several representatives of IPCC working groups. The Conference was preceded by advanced courses on adaptation metrics and techniques for agriculture and water, held at Mohamed VI Polytechnic University on 24 and 25 October 2018. Alongside ESCWA and RICCAR, the Office chérifien des phosphates, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), 4C Maroc and the Research Institute for Development also contributed to those events. Several participants requested RICCAR datasets following the Conference, and expressed their appreciation for the regional outputs on climate, water and vulnerability.

B. Preparations for COP 24

10. COP24 is part of the Katowice Climate Change Conference, which will also include the fourteenth session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol and the third part of the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement. The Conference will also include the forty-ninth session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation, and the seventh part of the first session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement.

11. It is expected that the Conference will finalize the rules for implementing the Paris Agreement under the Paris Agreement Work Programme. It will also include a number of high-level events, mandated events, action events and round tables. The Talanoa Dialogue will take stock of the collective efforts of parties to achieve the long-term goal of the Paris Agreement, and inform the preparation of nationally determined contributions, which should be updated and submitted by 2020.

12. In preparation for those global negotiations, the eleventh Regional Training Workshop on Capacity Development for Climate Change Negotiations for the Arab Countries was organized in Cairo from 13 to 15 November 2018 by the League of Arab States and ESCWA, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme and the Cairo Office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Arab Group of climate change negotiators participates in these biannual workshops, which are called for under ESCWA resolution 329 (XXX) and mandated by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and the Arab Ministerial Water Council. ESCWA support for those workshops is provided through the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation (RPTC).

13. Participants at the Regional Training Workshop discussed the latest negotiation items under the Paris Agreement Work Programme as they relate to adaptation, mitigation, finance, technology, carbon markets, trade and other matters. They reviewed the outcomes of the 2018 Talanoa Dialogue, and examined the status of negotiations and possible scenarios for a Katowice package, including desired outcome, difficulties, redlines, and linkages. They also discussed issues related to including adaptation as an element of nationally determined

contributions, and how to define the global adaptation goal. Moreover, they reviewed the key findings of the IPCC Special Report and their implications for Arab countries.

14. They debated the proposed transparency system, and the importance of balancing transparency of action and support was identified as a priority for developing countries. They addressed other important topics, including the operationalization of policy measures to respond to the expected impacts of climate change response measures, market and non-market approaches and possible outcome and trade-offs, the current status of technology framework implementation, features of nationally determined contributions, information and accounting. A common position paper was then developed by the Arab Group on the above issues in preparation for the COP24 negotiations.

II. ARAB CENTRE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE POLICES

15. The establishment of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies was welcomed by ESCWA member States in resolution 329 (XXX). The resolution requests ESCWA to support member States through five pillars of work focused on the following: (a) providing technical assistance and advisory services; (b) capacity building and the strengthening of institutional frameworks; (c) supporting regional platforms and regional consensus-building; (d) promoting integrated responses to climate challenges affecting water, energy and food security; and (e) providing access to regional knowledge and information through the Regional Knowledge Hub. The resolution also provides further detail on areas of capacity-building and iterated its support for RICCAR-related work, including the partnerships that ESCWA maintains with the League of Arab States and other relevant organizations.

A. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

16. The Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies consolidates the work of ESCWA on climate change under a common umbrella. Several activities have been undertaken in support of the Centre through the use of extrabudgetary resources (XB) and funds secured through the RPTC. The table below sets out the advisory missions, meetings and workshops undertaken during the second half of 2018 drawing upon these resources.

17. The online platform of the RICCAR Regional Knowledge Hub was launched in June 2018 and is available at www.riccar.org. A memorandum of understanding was signed between ESCWA and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to develop and host the data portal component of the Regional Knowledge Hub, including all the geospatial datasets and modelling outputs generated for the Arab region. ESCWA and the Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid and Dry Lands (ACSAD) of the League of Arab States manage the technical secretariat of the Regional Knowledge Hub, and the Technical Scientific and Advisory Committee Arab Ministerial Water Council oversees its operations.

18. ESCWA and ACSAD are collaborating on the delivery of climate change datasets and training through RICCAR and the Food and Water Security in the Arab Region project, which are both funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The Regional Initiative for Promoting Small-scale Renewable Energy Applications in Rural Areas of the Arab Region further supports the work of the Arab Centre and is also funded by Sida.

19. Numerous requests for RICCAR datasets were received from ministries, regional organizations, universities and researchers. A regional advisor is being recruited to help respond to those requests and to deliver training on the use of the datasets at smaller scales of analysis using geographic information system tools. The knowledge products and services delivered through the Regional Knowledge Hub support the work of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies.

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BETWEEN JULY AND DECEMBER 2018

Event	Venue	Date	Pillar of work (see para. 15)	Funding source
Training Workshop on Climate Change Analysis using Geographic Information Systems	Beirut	19-20 September	b	XB
Technical backstopping to national teams for the preparation of national assessment reports of changing water availability on agriculture crop production in the Arab region for Iraq, Jordan and the State of Palestine	Amman	For Iraq: 2-3 September For Jordan: 10-11 September For the State of Palestine: 12-13 September	a	XB
Declaration on Climate Change Ethics Seminar (organized by UNESCO)	Cairo	24-25 September	c	RPTC
Symposium on Cyclones and Flash Floods (contribution requested by Oman Water Society)	Muscat	8-9 October	a	XB
Cairo Water Week: RICCAR presentations delivered during (a) main conference; and (b) International Commission on Irrigation Drainage special meeting for young professionals	Cairo	15-16 October	a, b	XB
Advanced Courses on Adaptation Metrics for Agriculture and Water	Benguerir, Morocco	24-25 October	b	XB
International Conference on Adaptation Metrics and Techniques for Water, Agriculture and Resilient Cities, including Outreach Event on the IPCC Special Report on 1.5 degrees	Benguerir, Morocco	26-27 October	a	XB
Consultation meetings in pilot countries on small-scale renewable energy applications in the Arab region	Tunis Beirut Amman	Tunis: 29-31 October Beirut: 23 November Amman: Dec (tbc)	a	XB
Eleventh Regional Training Workshop on Capacity Development for Climate Change Negotiations for the Arab Countries	Cairo	12-15 November	b	RPTC
Arab Climate Outlook Forum (ArabCOF) – third meeting (hosted by the Egyptian Meteorological Authority)	Cairo	26-29 November	c	XB
National Training Workshop on the Application of Climate Change Impact and Vulnerability Assessments for Lebanon (requested by the Ministry of Agriculture)	Beirut	26-30 November	b	XB
Colloquium on Hydrodiplomacy and Climate Change for Peace in Mesopotamia: Case of the Tigris and Euphrates (organized by MEDURABLE, MENBO and French Senate)	Paris	10 December	a	XB
National Workshop on the Sendai Framework Monitor and National Disaster Loss Accounting System and Linkage of Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction for Iraq (requested by the Ministry of Health and Environment)	Beirut	18-21 December	b	RPTC
National Training Workshop on the Application of Climate Change Impact and Vulnerability Assessments for Tunisia (requested by the Ministry of Agriculture)	Tunis	December/January (tbc)	b	XB

B. Related activities

20. In addition to the aforementioned climate change activities conducted under the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies, a series of regular budget activities were also completed during the second half of 2018 that upscale and complement the work of the Centre with new knowledge products.

21. The seventh issue of the ESCWA Water Development Report focuses on climate change and disaster risk reduction, and was released in Arabic and English in October 2018. It examines the links between climate change and communities at risk, and considers policies to address natural disasters, particularly water-related disasters such as droughts, floods and landslides, which are being exacerbated by climate change. It draws on RICCAR outputs and includes analysis on the risk and frequency of disasters and resulting losses in selected Arab countries based on work conducted in cooperation with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. The Water Development Report will inform the national workshop requested by Iraq to support the preparation of their Sendai Framework communication (see table).

22. The ninth International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development was convened by the five United Nations regional commissions in Kiev from 12 to 15 November 2018. ESCWA organized several sessions at the Forum on renewable energy and energy efficiency, including a joint session on tracking progress on SDG 7. Participants examined issues related to data digitization and finance, and support for regional engagement on climate change mitigation.

23. ESCWA is also implementing the United Nations Development Account project on up-scaling energy efficiency in the residential and services sectors in the Arab region, which aims to improve energy efficiency and thus reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Consultative meetings and advisory services were conducted in Tunis from 29 to 30 October 2018, and will be conducted in Jordan on 15 December 2018 and in Kuwait later in December.

C. Resource mobilization and partnerships

24. ESCWA has organized meetings with several prospective partners and donors that have expressed interest in the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies since its establishment in June 2018.

25. Meetings were organized with the Islamic Development Bank in Beirut in August and October 2018 to discuss opportunities for collaboration and support. ESCWA subsequently submitted to the Islamic Development Bank a concept note in October 2018, which led to the Bank expressing interest in further discussions on ways to collaborate on climate change and the SDGs.

26. The work pillars of the Arab Centre and the ways in which RICCAR is contributing to that work were presented at meetings with Sida in Stockholm in August 2018 and in Beirut in September 2018. Interest in a second phase of RICCAR, which would support the work of the Arab Centre, was expressed, with the caveat that the next project funding cycle would likely not be possible before 2020 given that the current RICCAR funding line runs through December 2019.

27. ESCWA met with the Global Energy Interconnection Development and Cooperation Organization (GEIDCO) in Beirut in November 2018 to present the work of the Arab Centre within the context of its energy and sustainable development work programme. The meeting built on previous exchanges that proposed the signing of a memorandum of understanding to establish a general framework for cooperation on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, in particular SDG 7 on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all and promoting and supporting international energy cooperation.

28. In August 2018, the ESCWA Executive Secretary sent a communication to the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC Secretariat on the establishment of the Centre, which resulted in the UNFCCC designating counterparts to coordinate with ESCWA on the work of the Centre in October 2018. UNFCCC also

contributed to the Workshop on Environment Statistics and Information for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region, which was held in Beirut from 12 to 16 November 2018 and featured a session on climate change statistics, databases and RICCAR. The United Nations Statistics Division, the European Environment Agency and the United Nations Environment Programme partnered with ESCWA on the workshop, which also supported the work of the Arab Centre.

III. PLANNED ACTIVITIES

A. GLOBAL AND REGIONAL FORUMS

29. The 2019 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development will focus on the theme "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality". Six SDGs are identified for focused review, including SDG 13 which encourages urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. This global forum will be preceded by the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development to be held by ESCWA in Beirut from 16 to 18 April 2019, which will also focus on SDG 13. ESCWA will support awareness raising and consensus-building for climate action at those regional and global forums based on regionally identified challenges and priorities.

30. Member States and partners have also expressed their interest in organizing a joint event on the sidelines of the High-level Political Forum session to be convened in July and September 2019, noting that the second part of the Forum will be held following the United Nations Climate Summit, which will be convened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in New York on 23 September 2019.

31. ESCWA will also provide substantive support on climate change to other regional forums, including the Arab Water Week (Dead Sea, Jordan, 3-7 March 2019), the thirteenth Gulf Water Conference (Kuwait City, 12-14 March 2019) and the Land and Water Days (Cairo, April 2019). Those forums will provide opportunities to strengthen partnerships and collaboration with member States.

B. REGIONAL CONSULTATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

32. ESCWA will convene a regional consultative meeting on climate change in Beirut in February 2019 to support regional preparations for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and the High-level Political Forum. This regional consultation is expected to provide substantive input to regional and global forums on Arab climate change perspectives through the issuance of an outcome statement. Several partners have already expressed interest in contributing to this regional consultation, which will be organized by ESCWA under the umbrella of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies.

33. Special effort will be made to engage ESCWA member States delivering voluntary national reviews at the 2019 High-level Political Forum in this regional consultation, namely Kuwait, Oman and Tunisia. Algeria will also be presenting a voluntary national review for the first time. The regional consultation will assist Arab States to prepare and position their proposed actions and reports on progress within the regional context.

C. OTHER ACTIVITIES

34. ESCWA will continue to support member States by providing assistance through the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies and its regular programme of work.

35. ESCWA will also continue to systematically offer climate change analysis and present its climate change activities at intergovernmental meetings, as requested by intergovernmental mechanisms at the following upcoming meetings:

(a) Meeting of the Subcommittee on Weather and Climate Risk Information Management (Cairo, January 2019);

(b) Fourth meeting of the Arab Climate Outlook Forum (venue and date to be confirmed);

(c) Thirty-fifth meeting of the Arab Permanent Committee for Meteorology (Cairo, April 2019);

(d) Twelfth session of the ESCWA Committee on Energy (Beirut, April 2019);

(e) Thirteenth session of the ESCWA Committee on Water Resources (Beirut, May 2019);

(f) Twelfth Regional Training Workshop on Capacity Development for Climate Change Negotiations for the Arab Countries (venue and date to be confirmed);

(g) Eighteenth session of the Arab Ministerial Water Council Technical Scientific Advisory Committee (Cairo, June 2019).

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

36. The ESCWA Executive Committee may wish to consider the following:

(a) Continue drawing upon climate change analysis, findings, recommendations and services available through the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies to inform regional and national policies, strategies, reports and research;

(b) Take note of efforts to mobilize financial resources to support the activities of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies, including the RICCAR Regional Knowledge Hub, for the provision of knowledge resources tailored to the needs of the region, and urge for the intensification of those efforts. Those additional resources would complement the extrabudgetary project funds and resources provided through the regular programme of technical cooperation that already support the work of the Centre;

(c) Continue regional consultations on climate change to support regional exchange and priority-setting on climate action with respect to SDG 13 to inform regional preparations and inputs for the 2019 High-level Political Forum.